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The Wonder of Creation

by Rev. Bruce Schoup; Peace Church, UCC; Clemson, SC

You've heard it, maybe even have said it; "The place I most experience God is in nature." We know this to be true and yet almost everything we do as church has nothing to do with the out of doors and when we do something out of doors it is an activity that rarely attempts to be intentional in its intersecting with the sacred.

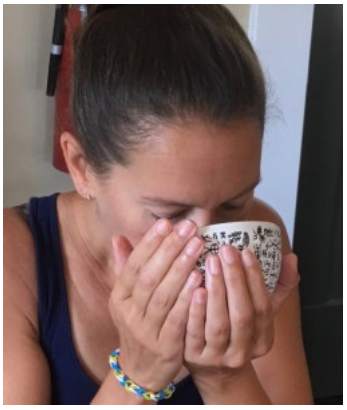
At Peace Church we decided to do something about this and create spiritual experiences that included the out of doors. We have been calling these experiences 2nd Sundays.

Supplied with a grant from the Southeast Conference, beginning last April found a group of our church members and friends gathering and experiencing the sacred in a natural setting. Since that first experience, we have experienced water falls, kayaked, biked, and experienced a Japanese Tea Ceremony. We have gone to state parks, Botanical gardens, and traveled the length of a rail trail. We have doodled with chalk, written haikus, created a stella. Incredibly only one was cancelled due to weather and that was because the river was too low (this would have incorporated the writings of Thoreau from one of his books filled with observations from a week on a river).

We have been intentional about taking "out door experiences" and not turning them into adventures, but making them spiritual. We have also been intentional about minimizing words and letting the earth speak for itself. In the stillness and grandeur, God's revelation takes place. Yes there is prayer and readings and actions. We do allow time for conversation, laughter, and food. Sometimes there is even an activity. Always we make room silence and quiet as we spend time being reminded of the abundant earth which is our home. God is alive.

Our first outing is my personal favorite. Our group, entirely on its own initiative walked to and from Kings Falls, mindfully present. I had planned a brief opening and closing, and a meditative time at the falls. The group quietly talked with one another at the falls and then again at the end. Powerful and alive. I am appreciative for Julie for organizing this first experience. My second favorite was Station Cove Falls on 9/11. At the falls we remembered, built a stella in the spirit of the Patriarchs, with one stone coming from each member (we are Peace Church and UCC, so one person broke the rules and substituted a piece of bark—just fine). As our stella arose, we named names and poured healing oils. In preparation, many washed their stones in the nearby stream. Thank you Charline and Russ for suggesting Station Cove Falls.

As I write, I am planning an experience which includes a peaceful walk on the shores of Issaqueena Lake. As this experience will take place on the Sunday after the election, I am calling it "Breath and the Psalm". It will be a time to calm our beings.



Participants lift up two very different experiences that they describe as their favorites. The one they most mention was the day we went to the Botanical gardens, meditatively walked, wrote haiku's, and then gathered for a Japanese Tea Ceremony. Simple and beautiful. They also like to talk about kayaking on Lake Joccassee and the intentional gathering on the lake shore for devotional time. Maggie, led us with native American Spirituality as we prayed in the four directions and then experienced a water ceremony. Life giving. Thank you Maggie and Shell.

We have been enjoying planning...and I do mean "we." In the plans are a Pine Tree walk (December & decorating a tree for the critters), Labyrinths and creating our own using corn or bird seed, fire and Maya Angelou, Oconee Bells, Communion on Table Rock, creek walks (in the water), petroglyphs (one of the most ancient spiritual expressions and we have them in our region), back to Thoreau and Canoeing. Because one of our leaders loves to fish, I have been thinking about incorporating fishing into a "spiritual experience"—I think I got it—we might have to change Sunday's but could you imagine the resurrection story of Peter and the other disciples going fishing being told with a campfire and grilled fish just caught?

Yes, we are finding God very much alive in the natural world. God is renewing our beings and is renewing our church. Thank you Southeast Conference for helping to make this happen.

‹ Attention Youth: Help Refugees, Win Scholarships!

Early Registration for Winter Youth Retreat is Nov 4 ›

Upcoming Events

NOV 5 Sat (http://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/calendar/action~onday/exact_date~11-5-2016/)

10:00 am Commission on Ministry meeting @ Pilgrim UCC (http://www.secucc.org/event/commission-on-ministry-meeting-11-5/?instance_id=142295)

NOV 12 Sat (http://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/calendar/action~onday/exact_date~11-12-2016/)

2:00 pm Bill and Jan Bourdon's Retiremen... @ Blowing Rock Conference Center (http://www.secucc.org/event/bill-jan-bourdons-retirement-celebration/?instance_id=142307)

NOV 24 Thu (http://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/calendar/action~onday/exact_date~11-24-2016/)

all-day Office Closed Thanksgiving (http://www.secucc.org/event/office-closed-thanksgiving/?instance_id=142044)

NOV 30 Wed

all-day Authorizing Ministry in the 21st... @ San Antonio (http://www.secucc.org/event/authorizing-ministry-21st-century/?instance_id=142305)